



GETTING BACK ON TRACK AFTER THE HOLIDAY BLUES

"I survived another holiday season."

You've heard it said. Maybe you've said it yourself. For most, it's simply a figure of speech. They may "survive" certain aspects of the holidays – the stresses of shopping, piling up debt, travel, etc. – but the overall experience involves joyous celebrations that draw together family and friends.

For some, however, getting through the holidays may actually feel like a matter of survival. They experience all of the stressors and none of the joy. They feel completely out of step with the good cheer all around them. They had expected to relive the happiness of holidays past, but it didn't happen. They've got the holiday blues, and it stays with them after the decorations have been stored and New Year's toasts have been forgotten.

There may be logical reasons for feeling down during the holidays. For example, you may have lost someone close to you, and not having that person around for this special time of the year might rekindle your grief. Perhaps you suffer from seasonal affective disorder (SAD), which results in symptoms of depression when there's less exposure to sunlight. Or maybe you have such high expectations for the holidays that you're always disappointed.

If your emotional low is simply the lingering blues, there are things you can do to lift your spirits. Here are a few suggestions:

- » **Reconnect with your social network.** Perhaps you isolated yourself during the holidays because you didn't want your bad mood to spoil anyone's fun. Whatever the reason for shutting yourself off from others, it's time to reach out and do things with people whose company you enjoy.
- » **Get back to healthy habits.** The days got shorter and the weather turned cold, so you stopped exercising. You overdid the holiday food and treats. The damage is reversible if you make the right choices. Take your exercise routine inside, if necessary. Don't let a holiday slipup discourage you from eating properly. Feeling better physically helps you feel better emotionally.
- » **Get some sun.** Go outside at lunchtime on workdays. Plan outdoor activities for the weekend.
- » **Make a realistic assessment of the holidays.** Realizing that your expectations were set too high should help temper the disappointment.
- » **Find time to relax.** Even as you get back into the work routine, regularly give yourself some peace and quiet. This lowers the stress level and helps you heal mentally.

What if you've tried things like this and still can't shake the blues? In that case, you may be experiencing a bout of depression, an illness that strikes an estimated 19 million Americans each year. The National Institute of Mental Health has information about depression and its symptoms here:

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/depression/complete-publication.shtml>.

Don't try to fight major depression on your own. It's a serious condition. If you're struggling with it, getting help is the best gift you can give yourself – any time of the year.

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This article is for informational and self-help purposes only. It should not be treated as a substitute for financial, medical, psychiatric, psychological or behavioral healthcare advice, nor as a substitute for consultation with a qualified professional.

Do you think your holiday blues could actually be major depression? Call your EAP!

Your Employee Assistance Program can help with this and other problems you may face. You can ask about:

- » Emotional health
- » Nutrition and physical fitness
- » Alcohol and substance abuse
- » Relationships with co-workers

Call *any time* for a telephonic consultation.

For more information, call
(866) EAP-4SOC
(866) 327-4762
TDD callers, please dial (800) 327-0801

Or visit us online at:
www.eap4soc.mhn.com
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